

SECRET # 3 - GOAL SETTING AND PLANNING

*“Good plans shape good decisions.
That's why good planning helps to
make elusive dreams come true.”*

Lester R. Bittel

Do you often wonder why the guy or gal next store is so successful? How they seem to get so much more done than you do?

Well here is a little story that illustrates how most of us live our lives. A customer calls a travel agency. The Travel Agent responds by saying “Good morning, XYZ Travel, how may I help you?” Customer: “I would like to take a vacation.” Travel Agent: “Where would you like to go?” Customer: “I am not sure, can you suggest a destination for me?” Travel Agent: “Well, Florida is a great place this time of year.” Customer: “That sounds good.” Travel Agent: “Where would you like to visit in Florida?” Customer: “Well, I am not sure any suggestion?” Travel Agent: “Orlando is a great spot with Disneyland being so close, how does that sound?” Customer: “Great.” Travel Agent: “When would you like to travel?” Customer: “Well my schedule is kind of open, when is the next flight?” Travel Agent: “We have a flight on June 2nd at 9:00 a.m., will that work for you?” Customer: “Sure.” Travel Agent: “Where would you like to stay while you are in Orlando?” Customer: “I don't know any suggestions.” Travel Agent: “The Hyatt is a great place.”

You get the drift that this customer has no clear idea of where they are going and what they really want. Believe it or not this is how most of us live our lives. If we did not have to get up to go to work or prepare the kids for school we would not have any idea what to do with our lives.

The people that are successful have goals. There is a reason for them to get up in the morning because they have an idea as to where they are going and what they want from life. The fact that these people have a goal gives them a sense of purpose and a direction to move towards. When someone asks them where they are going and how they are going to get there they know the answer and do not need any prodding.

Once you have a major goal in mind you can set up many smaller or mini goals that will lead you to the attainment of that major goal.

Here is a simple example.

I plan to take a trip. The goal is to travel to my parent's place, which is a 3-hour drive away. To attain this goal I need to put certain things in place. So my mini goals may look like, getting the car ready and filled with fuel, packing the clothes I will require, taking pets to friends, securing the home and leaving at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday Nov. 24th. All these smaller goals ensure the attainment of the major goal.

The achievement of mini-goals gives the person a sense of accomplishment that will lead to a feeling of success. These smaller successes build onto each other leading to the completion of the major goal.

People have a tendency to start with a goal that is so large that they are not able to attain the major goal and become frustrated and give up. The major goal must be supported by smaller bite sized goals that are realistic. If they are not realistic then not achieving even the smaller goals will lead to a sense of failure and leave us unfulfilled.

It is also important to have many goals in our lives. For an example you may have a goal for your career, relationship, children, recreational activities and so on. Having multiple goals will allow you to have more successes and a more balanced life.

So what goals do you have in your life? What things would you like to accomplish? What have you always wanted, or wanted to do, yet have not done because you thought it would never happen or you believed that you could never achieve it? Remember it is okay to think big here. This material will assist you in achieving things that you have never dreamed of achieving.

When you are in your later years what do you want to remember about the life you have led and what you were able to achieve. If you do not set goals then you have no direction as to where life leads you. Any event or crisis will knock you off course. At the end of the day you will be left wondering what I did I do with all that time I had in my life.

A twin to Goal setting is **PLANNING**. There is a saying that the financial services industry likes to use that goes something like this “People do not plan to fail, they fail to plan.” The essence of the phrase is that we do not consciously go out into the world hoping to fail at our endeavours. Instead failing to plan leads us to failure.

Here is an illustration of this concept. You are about to go on a trip to somewhere you have never been before. You pack the car, get the kids ready, get fuel and do all the things you generally do to prepare for the trip. Everyone is in the car and ready to go. Unfortunately you have no idea how to get to your destination. You have no idea what routes or highways to take, how long it will take to get there, what the traffic patterns will be like or the road conditions.

This is an example of what life is like when you do not plan. Some people never plan and wonder why they never get where they want to or get ahead or are successful. They are aimlessly driving down the road of life and ending up everywhere but where they want to go.

So what is Planning? Planning is the act of thinking ahead about what lies ahead. Planning allows you to take into account any problems or concerns that may arise as a result of your decision to accomplish a task or prepare for an event. It reduces the risk of anything going wrong and allows you to get to where you want to.

The accomplishment of anything in life is a process. Most things do not just suddenly happen one day or in isolation. It is a series of events that leads to the successful completion of the goal. It is a process. People do not just win the lottery. They must choose to play. Have the money to buy a ticket. Select the numbers they wish to play. Select the type of lottery to partake in. Drive or walk to the ticket sales booth. Complete the forms required. Pay their money and receive the ticket. Wait for the night of the draw. Check the ticket after the draw to see if they are a winner. Do you see how something as simple as playing the lottery is indeed a process?

If life is a process then it can be planned. The better you are at planning the better your chances that your desired goal will be achieved.

So how can I be a better planner? “Begin with the end in mind” and work backwards. This is a concept introduced and discussed more fully in the 7 Habits of Highly Effective people written by Stephen R. Covey.

What does “begin with the end in mind” look like? It is taking your ultimate goal and moving backwards to where you are now. Take the example of the lottery ticket. I know I want to win the lotto. This is my ultimate goal. So what do I need to do this? I start working backwards from having that be a reality. I know to win I need a ticket. I need to find a place where I can purchase the ticket. I need to get to the ticket place. I need some numbers to play. What numbers am I going to use? Will I use birth dates, a random formula, numbers that come up more frequently etc? How many tickets am I going to buy? Where will I get the money for the tickets?

Planning is the key to getting things done and accomplishing your goals. Planning is the process of taking a bigger project and breaking it into smaller tasks prior to actually doing the task. It is thinking ahead and looking at the possible obstacles that may arise before they happen. It is anticipating rather than reacting.

Once you have planned the events leading to your goal you can use things like ‘to do’ lists as a tool to keep you on track. It is also essential to add time-lines to the individual tasks to gauge your performance against.

Say you wanted to save \$1200 a year from now. This may seem impossible to do as a lump sum amount at one time. However, if you break it down and give it a timeline it becomes easier to digest. If you were to put away \$100 per month it may be and sound more manageable. You can then check your progress by measuring how many months you have actually made the contribution to the savings account. This will let you measure if you are on track. If \$100 sounds like it is too much how about breaking it down to \$25 per week or \$3.33 per day. All of a sudden you may feel that you can put away \$3.33 per day and accomplish your goal successfully.

The link between goals, that place where you want to go or the thing you want to complete and planning, which is taking inventory of where you are today, is strategy. Strategy in this context is how do I get from my plan to my goal. So let me show you an example of strategy.

The Goal: To go on vacation to a cottage in a provincial park 200 miles away.

The Plan: Select a date and time to go.
Reserve a space at the campsite.
Rent a car and arrange pick up time and drop-off.
Prepare camping gear, tent, sleeping bags, food etc.
Map out the route to the campground.

The Strategy: Leave on Friday night the 24th, after all the rush hour traffic has gone.
Pickup the car Thursday so that if there is a problem at the rental company there is time to respond.
Pack on Wednesday but purchase the groceries on Tuesday to allow time for freezing of the food, and to ensure there is enough room in the car.
Air out the tent on Wednesday so that we can mend any holes.
Take highway #48 to highway #12 to the campground; if there is construction then take highway #7 instead.

Notice how the strategy handles all the “what if” questions. Like in chess, where the players strategize several moves ahead of the current move, so must you, in moving from where you are today to the goals you have tomorrow.

EXERCISE I

- i) List several goals that you would like to complete in your lifetime. Use the activity log and the goal, planning and strategy sheets that are attached below.
- ii) Select those that you truly wish to achieve.
- iii) Choose a timeline by which you wish to achieve the goal. Be specific.
- iv) Create a list of mini-goals that will need to be completed to achieve your major goals.

This exercise will take time. Allow yourself time to do it over several sittings and revise and update as you go along. Use the activity log on the next page to help you organize your tasks.

EXERCISE II

So try it on. Take an event and truly plan it. Begin with what your ultimate goal is then break it into smaller tasks. Add a timeline for each task. Then create a 'to do' list with the dates and times that things need to be completed by.

The more of these planning sessions that you complete successfully the more your confidence will grow. Your ability to complete tasks becomes a daily part of your life and the little successes lead to bigger ones. Use the activity log on the next page to help you in organizing your tasks and use the strategy planner on the Goal, Planning and Strategy Sheet to develop how you are going to achieve your goals. It is recommended that you print out several of these as the plans and strategy may require frequent revision.

